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Speaker - Developing a professionally-led professional doctorate structure in social work

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Developing a Professionally-led Professional Doctorate Structure in Social Work

Marian O'Rourke, Northern Ireland Social Care Council

Karen Winter, Queen's University Belfast

Brian Taylor, Ulster University



Current Social Work Education & Training



Regulates Social Work workforce and Education/Training at Qualifying and Post Qualifying Levels

6,048 Social Workers and 699 Social Work students across H&SC, Justice, Education, Voluntary sectors

Education and Training Partnerships with Employers , Academia and other Stakeholders

Bachelor of Social Work = Professional Qualification – Under Graduate and Relevant Graduate Routes



CPD Framework for Social Work – as part of Registration

Aligned to Post Graduate Academic Levels: PG Cert/PG Dip/MSc

Professional Awards:

- Consolidation (for newly-qualified, incoming and returning workers)
- Specialist (specialist skill areas, practice, supervision, management)
- Leadership (leading and influencing others)

Drivers for Professional Award at Doctorate level

Professional Needs –

- On a par with related professions
- Progression beyond Masters
- Development of Principal Practitioner role

PhD focus on research skills; BUT what is required is:

Beyond MSc level in complexity and depth
Focus on innovation and strategic development rather than research itself
Option for learning to be in bite-sized chunks

Employer Needs –

- Employers want more robust, evidence-based services
- Need innovative, strategic thinking to develop services
- Developing ('making sense of') outcomes-based accountability
- Strong professional base in integrated service structure



Steps on the developmental journey

- ▶ QUB - a professional doctorate in childhood studies (DChild) since 2007. Built upon the professional doctorate in education (EdD). Social workers applied to DChild
- ▶ Concern by SWs - doctoral qualifications not professionally recognised
- ▶ Attempt by QUB to seek professional accreditation of DChild in 2014/15 highlighted issues with fit but a desire on part of NISCC to develop professional accreditation at doctoral level
- ▶ 2016 discussion at 3rd Northern Ireland Annual Social Research Conference
 - Testing appetite for possibility of a doctorate-level professional award
 - Agreement for working group, convened by NISCC to include: social workers in academia and management; some with traditional or 'taught' doctorates
- ▶ Building on qualifying and post-qualifying partnership working

Developing the Concept

Partnership in Action



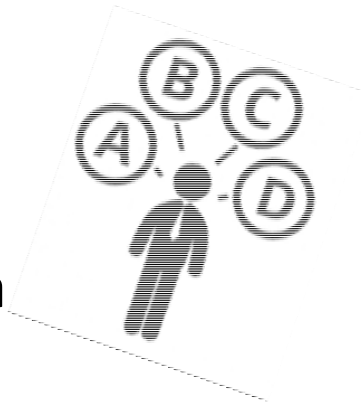
Shaping the Award Framework



- Building on existing Professional in Practice (post-qualifying) Awards
- Routes to achievement
- Quality Assurance
- Fit with academic awards
- Competence/Capability statements
- Scope of market
- Provisional Name - Strategic Innovation Award in Social Work – in quality and quantity equivalent to doctorate
- Approved by Professional in Practice Partnership and Northern Ireland Social Care Council

Options within the Framework

- ▶ Programmes approved by NISCC, provided by a partnership of a university and at least one employer
 - E.g. QUB Doctorate in Childhood Studies
- ▶ Modular, self-directed learning led by employers with university support
 - Possibility of Ulster University modular provision modelled on Individual Assessment Route to existing post-qualifying, post-graduate Awards
- ▶ Accreditation of prior learning
 - Use of material from PhD study, etc.



Stakeholder interests



Integrated partnership of perspectives of:

- ▶ Employer role: relevance to current issues & service development
- ▶ Academic role: rigour, transferability of learning, theoretical basis
- ▶ Regulator role: meeting professional standards
- ▶ Embodying and supporting development of professional perspectives:
 - continuing learning, motivation,
 - career, confidence in professional role,
 - development of expertise,
 - responsibility for developing the professional knowledge and skill base

Delivering what is needed for the profession

- ▶ Social worker as **practitioner**
 - Ensures focus on practice-relevant knowledge & skills
- ▶ Social worker as **professional**
 - Development of stronger knowledge base
 - Facilitates integration of professional values
- ▶ Social worker as **social scientist**
 - Incorporates high level of cognitive skills applied to the work

Croisdale-Appleby D (2014) *Social work education review*. London: Department of Health and Social Care

Delivering what is needed for employers

- ▶ Structure to develop the knowledge and skills required for innovative strategic service development
- ▶ Learning and assessment must be clearly work-relevant
- ▶ Employer support is essential regardless of who pays the fees (evident workplace benefit is essential)
- ▶ Must demonstrate work-place benefit from assessed work (projects)
- ▶ Efficient knowledge-transfer partnership working

Delivering what is needed for individuals

- ▶ Opportunity and support for individuals to develop beyond the current post-qualifying framework
- ▶ Stimulus of creative learning environments
- ▶ Flexibility of framework within which various routes to a doctorate-level qualification will be available
- ▶ Academic qualifications (including doctorates) are an international currency readily understood across professions and jurisdictions

Views and perspectives – SW DChild student

"The professional doctorate has challenged me to think more widely and deeply than any other course I have ever attended. This form of study over a number of years allowed my thinking to mature and develop to doctoral level- I now make a significant contribution to health and social care in a way that I simply wouldn't have been able to before."

Views and perspectives –SW DChild student

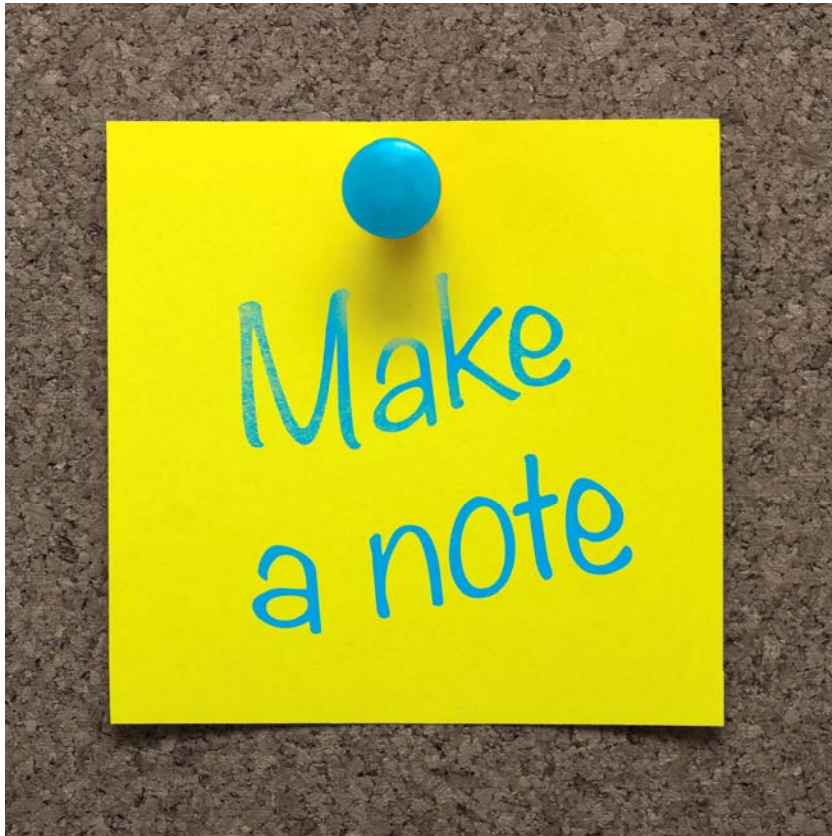
"The Professional Doctorate is unquestionably a superb way of developing both professionally and academically. Gaining a Doctorate by this flexible and stimulating method, ensures that one can focus on projects that are of critical importance for one's organisation, both operationally and strategically. One gets a real sense of making a truly transformative difference to the lives of service users due to the focus on real practice oriented research. My employer was exceptionally supportive of my research, seeing the difference it made directly to improving the service. A truly rewarding experience!"

Potential and Limitations



- ▶ An attractive option when funding is tight!
- ▶ High knowledge exchange/impact potential
- ▶ Requires good partnership working
- ▶ Challenging time wise given that the doctorate runs alongside full-time jobs/family commitments
- ▶ Employers perspectives – value added of doctoral level qualifications
- ▶ Sometimes an uneasy relationship between research, theory and practice

Watch Our Space



Marian.O'Rourke@niscc.hscni.net

K.Winter@qub.ac.uk

bj.taylor@ulster.ac.uk

